

Mary Lou Terrien

From: j vanbolt <vanbolt@hotmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, February 24, 2016 9:47 AM
To: Mary Lou Terrien
Subject: HB 5232

To: Local Government House Committee
From, John Van Bolt, Plymouth, MI

I am writing to express my hope that the committee will reject the ill-considered proposal to weaken, if not entirely undermine, the proven community benefits to those municipalities that have chosen to implement historic district ordinances pursuant to Public Act 169 of 1970.

From 1984 to 1987 I was an elected member of the Ypsilanti City Council. During my term, the Council undertook a review of Ypsilanti's existing historic district ordinance and I was member of a council-appointed committee that undertook a review of the ordinance, its enforcement, its alleged burdens on certain commercial property owners and whether those burdens were 1) significant and/or 2) not commensurate with the benefits conferred upon property owners in the district and the community as a whole. As a result of that study and the following debate before the Council, the City of Ypsilanti determined, as it had when the ordinance was originally adopted, that protection of the city's unique stock of historic structures was vital and that the benefits of the ordinance would continue to be a key component of the city's overall revitalization effort.

First, I must say that I am perplexed as to why state action is proposed to thwart the decisions of local municipalities to adopt, enforce and continue their own historic districts under legislation that has now been in place for over 45 years. Even more perplexing is the speed with which this proposal is moving through the legislative process without any meaningful opportunity for local governments to participate in that process. If the purpose of local government is to serve the local interests of its citizens, should not there have been more transparency regarding the purpose of this newly proposed legislation?

However, my strong opposition to HB 5232 is based, quite simply, on my personal experience with the successful historic district ordinances in Ypsilanti and Washtenaw County. In Ypsilanti, I considered and approved continuation of the ordinance as a member of the City Council, I considered and approved many, many applications submitted by property owners as a member of the Ypsilanti Historic District Commission and I submitted my own applications as a homeowner in the District. In each case, I saw first hand how the ordinance worked and how it brought with it increased residential property values in the city's central core, increased public awareness of the city's rich history and increased community pride (evidenced by, among other things, the city's annual Heritage Festival). I now live in a house designated as an historic structure by Washtenaw County and, again, I welcome the intent and the operation of the ordinance.

Does an historic district ordinance include some restrictions? Of course. In that respect, those ordinances are no different than any other zoning. In theory, I may be restricted by a local zoning ordinance that prohibits a hog slaughtering facility in a residential neighborhood. As a homeowner, however, it would be much more important to me to know that my neighbor cannot start slaughtering hogs next door. Similarly, if I choose to buy a house or commercial building that is part of a valued, flourishing historic district, it would be important

to me to know that construction, rehabilitation or demolition of the structures around me will continue to be regulated by clearly articulated national standards.

The Ypsilanti Historic District was adopted well over 30 years ago. By definition, a property owner in the original district (one of the largest in Michigan when it was created) has either lived with the ordinance for over 30 years or purchased the property knowing that the property was subject to the ordinance. During that time, the citizens of Ypsilanti have not seen fit to eliminate the protections conferred by the ordinance but have actually expanded the size of the district. Pushing through statewide legislation embodied in HB 5232 profoundly disrespects the will of those local communities which have willingly and enthusiastically adopted historic districts under PA 169 of 1970.

Thank you for your consideration,

John Van Bolt
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Plymouth, MI